

Leading Seaman Radio Operator (S) Garry Raymond RICKWOOD R95027

1st September 1949 – 28th August 2013

Garry was the middle child of Herbert and Nola Rickwood, born at Rylstone NSW 1st September 1949 and became the youngest child in a Dr Barnardo's children's home when he was only five years old. His parents' marriage had ended and his sisters went with his mother while his father placed him in the home. He lost contact with his father for many years but they did re-connect later in his life. He left Dr Barnardo's at the age of 16 in 1965 and joined the Navy as a Junior Recruit at HMAS LEEUWIN, Fremantle. He travelled the world with the Navy, serving in HMA Ships MELBOURNE, YARRA, TORRENS and DERWENT and the shore establishments CERBERUS and HARMAN. Adrian Welbourne recalls one incident when he & Garry were doing their Radio Operator courses at CERBERUS and Garry, having not long attained his private pilot's licence, took Adrian up in a tiger moth as his first passenger and they clipped the pine trees at the end of the Tyabb airstrip on take-off, Garry laughed it off. Later they picked the residue pine trees from the wheels of the plane! Garry commenced skydiving while in the Navy and jumped all over the world wherever the ships visited. He had some very hairy experiences during this period including one notable occasion in Lahaina, Maui late 1971 while in TORRENS. He went skydiving with one Bob Cason but they misjudged a wind shift after they jumped but as Garry opened his chute last he landed in close proximity to the beach but Bob, who opened his at higher altitude landed well out to sea, out of sight & wasn't found till late that night, he was very lucky. The ship had been crash-sailed by then to assist. One of the ship's stewards on the beach saw Garry land in the water and paddled out on a lilo to assist him & while he was there a helo arrived but the crewman on the skids tried to haul Garry in, upset the helo & it crashed!! Luckily no one was killed but the pilot was badly injured & the steward was quite a hero for saving then three people in the water for which he got no recognition. Luckily both skydivers at the last minute decided to wear lifejackets but Garry lost the parachute which belonged to a friend!! His love of parachuting stayed with him throughout his life and he made many friends in parachuting communities. After nine years he left the Navy as a Leading Radio Operator (Special) and worked in London at the Australian High Commission for a short time. After returning to Australia he worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra where he met and married Valma in 1976. While expecting their first child they took a posting to Papua New Guinea where Casey was born in 1977. Returning to Canberra in 1978, Garry continued working with Foreign Affairs and in February 1979, Travis was born. Garry at this time was starting to look for another career and in 1980 he took up a position flying Cessnas for the Tumut Aero Club. Third son Aidan was born during this time. Flying was Garry's love and chosen career. Skydiving took a back seat for a few years when the family were young. Garry and Valma spent several years on a two acre property at Wondalga subsequently moving to Queensland where Garry acquired a job flying a Tiger Moth at Maroochy Airport doing joy flights. He then qualified as a flying instructor and took up a position at the airport. The family lived nearby at Coolum Beach for many years where the boys attended school. Still keen to progress his flying career he applied for an airline pilot's position with a small airline out of Maroochy. He was slowly but surely reaching the peak of his career and after years of study and training gained his commercial pilot's licence. The family lived at Coolum until 1998 when Valma and Garry decided to go their separate ways as the boys also set out on their own. Garry then re-located to the Gold Coast to continue his career flying as a Captain of larger planes. From his original Cessna flights, to the Tiger Moth, to instructing, to being an Airline Pilot, although it took many years, Garry was in his element. He met Lea in 2003 when he was flying for Qantas Link based at Coolangatta. Garry and Lea were married in 2006 at Tyagarah Airfield, Byron Bay. Lea had taken up skydiving after meeting Garry so they celebrated the occasion with a skydive. Not long after he became a captain for Jetstar and was still employed by them at the time of his death on the 28th of August 2013.

Garry held a world skydiving record – a sixty way formation of skydivers over age 60 was achieved in California in April 2012 and the record still stands today.

On August 15th, 2012 Garry had a bad landing trying to avoid another canopy at Byron Bay. He smashed his femur into five pieces and broke his pelvis in two places, along with a few ribs and vertebrae. After surgery and six weeks in traction in the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, he had lost an enormous amount of weight. When he didn't regain it alarm bells rang and he was

diagnosed with gastro-esophageal cancer, which had already spread to his liver. In spite of chemotherapy and radiation, he passed away seven months later at the age of 63. A memorial service was held at the Parkview Chapel on the Gold Coast on Tuesday 3rd September 2013. Subsequently his ashes were scattered during a skydive at Toogoolawah a few days later with Lea, Travis and Aidan joining Garry's many skydiving friends to form a broken circle. This has been recorded on youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-No8hFx5ls>

RIP Garry, fair winds & following seas. You certainly packed a hell of a lot into your sixty three years!